

Connecticut State Department of Education

Office of Student Supports and Organizational Effectiveness

**Bureau of Health/Nutrition, Family Services and
Adult Education**

**Guidance and Overview for the
Connecticut Primary Mental Health Grant Program
July 1, 2025- June 30, 2027**

**Grants must be in “LEA Superintendent Approved status” by 11:59 P.M.
on June 30, 2025, in the eGMS**

**The Primary Mental Health Grant Application must be completed online in
the eGMS.**

Purpose: To assist Connecticut school districts to better serve at-risk primary grade children through the availability of an early intervention mental health program for the detection and prevention of emotional, behavioral and learning problems.

This program is authorized pursuant to Sections 10-76t through 10-76w of the Connecticut General Statutes.

CONNECTICUT STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



**Charlene Russell-Tucker
Commissioner of Education**

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General Information

Legal Authority

Sections 10-76t through 10-76w (inclusive) of the Connecticut General Statutes (C.G.S.) direct the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) to establish a grant program to provide funds to local and regional boards of education for the establishment of a school-based Primary Mental Health Program (PMHP) for the detection and prevention of emotional, behavioral and learning problems in public school children in kindergarten through Grade 3.

In determining if a board of education shall be granted funds, the Commissioner of Education shall consider, but not be limited to, the following factors:

- availability in the school and community of professional, paraprofessional, and other program staff. Paraprofessional staff are selected on the basis of interpersonal and experiential qualities, rather than educational background;
- availability of space to accommodate the program in an elementary school building;
- demonstration of strong support by administrative personnel, teaching staff, pupil personnel staff, and local community mental health centers;
- reasonable evidence of future stability of the program (i.e., readiness of new districts and ongoing support for continuing districts); and
- the number of children enrolled in grades kindergarten through Grade 3 inclusive, in a school under the jurisdiction of such board of education experiencing behavioral, disciplinary, or early school adjustment difficulties.

Eligible Applicants

Local and regional boards of education may apply for these grants. The PMHP will be supported under the terms of this announcement and must be school-based and focus on the provision of services to children in kindergarten through Grade 3.

Applicants Should Take Special Note of the Following Criteria:

1. New applicants must operate the standard PMHP model hereafter called “Primary Project” (as outlined on pages 4–5).
2. If a school district has previously received state funding at any time to offer Primary Project (hereafter called “Continuing Districts”), the district may reapply if, and only if, the district offers Primary Project minimally at the previously funded level and:
 - a. expands Primary Project to offer one or more additional schools; or
 - b. implements or continues a Complementary Mental Health Program Component (CMHPC) at the same school (as outlined on page 5-6).
3. The services provided by school-based mental health professionals must be provided as in-kind contribution by the school district and not included in the proposed budget.

Purpose

The focus of this grant is on the implementation of general education, school-based early detection, and intervention programs that serve children in kindergarten through Grade 3. Research shows that early difficulties adjusting to school environments can lead to decreased academic and social-emotional functioning later in life. Young children who have difficulty adjusting to school may be withdrawn, show a lack of engagement, or struggle with peer and adult relationships. Primary Project's early intervention program aims to disrupt these outcomes by pairing young students with a trained Child Associate (CA) to provide one-on-one play-based support under the supervision of a school or community-based mental health professional. Continuing districts must implement complementary mental health components to enhance the impact of the Primary Project.

Application Priorities

Preference will be granted according to the following criteria:

1. Applicants who have never been awarded funding to support PMHP activities will receive a bonus of five points in the proposal scoring.
2. Districts that indicate in their proposal how Primary Project will create opportunities for parent involvement and support components that exceed the minimum requirements may receive up to a bonus of five points in the proposal scoring.
3. Districts that provide evidence of future stability of the Primary Project and its personnel through a continuation plan that includes explicit school board support for the continued implementation of Primary Project will receive a bonus of five points in the proposal scoring.
4. Priority School Districts that apply will be awarded a five-point bonus in the proposal scoring.
5. Alliance School Districts that apply will be awarded a five-point bonus in the proposal scoring.

Grant Award Decisions and Proposal Disposition

All submitted applications become the property of the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) and part of the public record. The CSDE reserves the right to make policy or programmatic adjustments after proposals have been submitted and may negotiate the terms of awards with selected applicants.

Review Process and Criteria

The CSDE will convene a panel to review all completed applications received by the due date. Grant awards will be negotiated and accepted with modifications, if necessary, in time for final award notification by late August, 2025. Each application will be rated according to the criteria provided within the scoring rubric.

The CSDE will notify applicants in writing of the acceptance or rejection of their proposals. If a proposal is selected for funding, the Bureau of Health/Nutrition, Family Services and Adult Education will initiate a grant award letter. The level of funding and effective dates of the

Primary Project will be set forth in the notification of the grant award. All grant awards are subject to availability of state funds. Grants are not final until award letters are executed.

Technical Assistance and Management

Agnes Quinones, CSDE Education Consultant, is the Program Manager. Questions regarding this Request for Proposals may be directed to her at 860-807-2126 or by email at agnes.quinones@ct.gov. The CSDE reserves the right to monitor program progress at least annually, including examination and approval of all reports and data collection.

Grant Awards

The estimated funding available statewide for the PMHP grant for Fiscal Year (FY) 2026 is \$345,288. There is no minimum grant award. The maximum grant award for both new and continuing districts is \$20,000.

Continuing districts must apply a *minimum* of 80 percent of state funds to Primary Project. Therefore, a *maximum* of 20 percent of state funds may be designated to the CMHC.

The amount designated for the CMHPC should be recorded on the PMHP Budget Worksheet for Continuing Districts.

The grant is funded for two years: Fiscal Years 2025-2026 and 2026-2027. Funding for each year is subject to the state budget appropriations. Grantees will be required to submit an End-of-Year Report (EYR) for Year 1 and a budget for Year 2 prior to receiving Year 2 funding. The second year of funding is contingent upon adequate progress toward program goals and use of funds in the first year.

For continuing applicants, the school district must contribute at least \$5,000.

Salaries of school personnel (e.g., administrators and school mental health professionals) **may not** be included as part of the school district's contribution.

Grant funds may not be used to support staff work beyond Primary Project activities as indicated in the approved district's grant proposal, nor may funds be used for student field placement stipends.

The CSDE reserves the right to make awards under this program without discussion with the applicants. Therefore, applications should represent the best effort from both a technical and cost standpoint.

Management Control of the Program

The grantee has complete management responsibility for this grant. While the CSDE staff may be consulted for their expertise, they will not be directly responsible for the selection of sub-grantees or vendors, nor will they be directly involved in the expenditure and payment of funds.

Primary Mental Health Grant Program Description

Description – Primary Project

Primary Project is a Tier 2 school-based program for children displaying school adjustment problems in the mild or moderate range (for instance, withdrawal or shy behaviors, mild acting out behaviors, and potential learning difficulties). It is not a program for children who have severe social, emotional, or behavioral difficulties. Primary Project aims at enhancing social, emotional, behavioral, and learning skills while reducing social, emotional, and school adjustment difficulties in kindergarten through 3rd grade children. Targeted outcomes for these children include increased task orientation, behavior control, assertiveness, and peer social skills.

General Project Requirements

1. Demonstrated support among a school's administrative, instructional, and pupil services staff.
2. For continuing districts, the implementation of a CMHPC (enhancing program support and stability through opportunities for improving pro-social behavior, school adjustment, early detection and/or screening and family support for education) or expansion to an additional school.
3. Availability of space to accommodate the program (i.e., playroom).
4. Employment of a Child Associate (CA) - a caring, responsible person with proven ability to relate well to children and provide direct services to children, as described in the following section.
5. Availability of one or more school mental health professionals to supervise the acceptance of children into the program (i.e., school psychologist, school social worker, and school counselor).
6. Availability of mental health professionals to select, train, and supervise paraprofessionals in program implementation. A mental health professional will provide the paraprofessional with at least one hour of scheduled direct supervision each week, along with additional consultation as needed.
7. Commitment to staff development for the CA through attendance at state level training. Attendance by the CA and program supervisor at two full-day trainings, as well as other trainings and technical assistance convening's that may be planned in the future.
8. Commitment to staff development for mental health professionals (who provide supervision to the CA) through attendance at state level training (contingent upon annual appropriations and availability of such training).
9. Systematic screening to identify children experiencing early school adjustment problems, supervised by the Mental Health Professional, using the Teacher-Child Rating Scale (T-CRS) (a nationally normed 32-item measure specifically designed for use by teachers to assess children's school and social behaviors), or other comparable measure as deemed appropriate by the CSDE.
10. Establish specific goals for individual children that evolve from the areas in which the child is identified to have difficulties.
11. Provision of individually focused child-centered play and the promotion of social development, improved self-concept, and adjustment to school.

12. Evaluation of student outcomes through the use of data collection measures identified by the CSDE (e.g., office referral, suspensions and academic performance).
13. Timely submission of four program updates (two per semester) and an end-of-year report following the formats provided by the CSDE.
14. Monitoring of student progress towards goal achievement through informal parent/teacher conferences, formal progress and termination conferences.
15. A plan designed to ensure parent involvement that includes:
 - a. Signed permission for student participation; and
 - b. Parent participation in program progress, termination conferences and evaluation to learn about their child's development and their needs.
16. Coordination of services with, and referrals of children to, community agencies that provide child and family services.
17. Linkages with other school-based prevention, early intervention programs, and supports including referrals for children not meeting the requirements for direct services through this program.
18. Evidence of future program sustainability.
19. Secure necessary signed releases/permission from the parents and/or legal guardians of student participants to allow the CSDE program manager and/or the CSDE designee to observe student(s) engaged in Primary Project activities/sessions during site visits.
20. Secure necessary releases/permission signed by parents and/or legal guardian(s) of student participants to allow the CSDE access to all Primary Project pre- and post-measure data (electronic and hard copy formats) gathered and maintained via the COMET Data Collection and Management System or DESSA.

Direct Services Provided by Child Associates

Research has shown that Primary Project has a positive effect on children's adjustment to school and sense of well-being. Essential to this model is the establishment of a personal relationship with the student who comes to trust and feel accepted by the CA. This relationship is established as each child:

- is seen on an individual basis;
- meets with the CA on a weekly basis outside of the classroom;
- engages in self-directed expressive play; and
- is provided direct services for at least 12-15 weeks.

Some latitude in the service delivery model is permissible. Acceptable practices are:

- following a child-centered therapeutic approach, children are allowed to choose their activities during play sessions;
- some children (i.e., those who will benefit) transition from individual to small group/play pair sessions. These sessions are initiated by the team and delivered after 12-15 individual sessions;
- the CA occasionally visits classrooms to become known to students and to become part of the school community; and
- the CA is familiar with the child led play skills/practices and uses these skills consistently during sessions.

Programs that engage in the following unacceptable practices, **which are contrary to the program's core concepts, will not be funded:**

- the service model regularly involves classroom-based instruction or coaching;
- each child's weekly sessions may be cancelled as a punishment; and
- the CA is used for general duties, disciplinary activities, academic instruction, office assistance, or other activities unrelated to the program.

Complementary Mental Health Program Component (CMHPC)

Continuing districts may apply for PMHP funding only if the district continues to offer Primary Project at a comparable level and either expands to one or more additional schools or implements (or continues) a CMHPC at the same school. A CMHPC is an extension of Primary Project and provides services such as positive behavioral supports and early detection and intervention services (i.e., for students at elevated risk and in kindergarten through Grade 3) that enhance the benefits of Primary Project through opportunities for improving pro-social behavior, school adjustment, early detection, and/or screening and family support for education.

Examples include early detection and/or screening activities and one or more of the following:

- collaboration to develop and/or increase the availability of community-based resources;¹
- classroom and schoolwide positive behavioral interventions;
- curriculum for teaching social skills or promoting social-emotional development;
- teaching self-control strategies;
- parent education/support to promote pro-social behavior and development;
- parent-to-parent mentoring/outreach program; and
- programmatic approaches to promoting a positive, supportive school environment.

Selecting more than one of the above programs will not improve the chances of being funded. More importantly, ensure that the program can be effectively designed and delivered with the resources available.

Minimum Requirements

1. The CMHPC must be an extension of Primary Project and support its overarching goals and objectives and have additional capacity beyond any CMHPC in previous years.
2. For continuing applicants, the school district must contribute at least \$5,000.
3. The district must meet the requirement of providing a CMHPC by continuing to offer activities that meet the description above.
4. The district must provide evidence that the CMHPC uses an approach and/or practices that are known to be evidence-based or research-based.

¹ One recommended means of developing community resources is through the local Community Collaborative. For more information, see Connecting to Care CT at: <https://www.connectingtocarect.org/collaboratives/>

5. The school(s) should have a building-based team or committee to coordinate and monitor Primary Project and related programs. Ideally, this should be an existing team.

Budget Requirements

Enter state funds budget using eGMS Budget Details. In addition to the budget detail narratives, use the Personnel Costs page to specify the time commitment for all project staff, including those not paid for by the grant. All continuing districts must complete the Local Contribution Budget page, specifying the local contribution. Line items in budget category 100 are to be itemized on a per diem basis for each individual.

Budget Detail Narratives

Provide a detailed description of the proposed use of funds for each budget detail. Wherever applicable, cite local policy and/or contractual basis for amounts requested. Examples:

1. “The salary amount is projected at the first step of the Education Aides salary range established in the local education agency's collective bargaining agreement.”
2. “Line 322 represents the contracted services of a workshop presenter who will be paid x dollars per day for y days.”

Please respond to this task with as much detail as possible in order to avoid requests for more information, which may delay the granting process.

Budget Object Codes

This list is a description of the object codes in the budget. The list is provided to help you in designing your budget for the program.

- 100 **Personal Services - Salaries.** Amounts paid to both permanent and temporary grantee employees, including personnel substituting for those in permanent positions. This includes gross salary for personal services rendered while on the payroll of the grantees.
- 200 **Personal Services - Employee Benefits.** Amounts paid by the grantee on behalf of the employees whose salaries are reported in line 100. These amounts are not included in the gross salary but are in addition to that amount. Such payments are fringe benefit payments and, while not paid directly to employees, nevertheless are part of the cost of personal services. Included are the employer’s cost of group insurance, social security contribution, retirement contribution, tuition reimbursement, unemployment compensation and workmen’s compensation insurance.
- 322 **In-service.** (Instructional Program Improvement Services). Payments for services performed by persons qualified to assist program personnel and/or teachers to enhance program quality or effectiveness. This category includes curriculum consultants, in-service training specialists, etc., who are not on the grantee payroll.

- 325 **Parent Activities.** Expenditures related to services for parenting including workshop presenters, counseling services, baby-sitting services, and overall seminar/workshop costs.
- 500 **Other Purchased Services.** Amounts paid for services rendered by organizations or personnel not on the payroll of the grantee (separate from Professional and Technical Services or Property Services). While a product may or may not result from the transaction, the primary reason for the purchase is the service provided.
- 600 **Supplies.** Amounts paid for items that are consumed, worn out, or deteriorated through use, or items that lose their identity through fabrication or incorporation into different or more complex units or substances.
- 700 **Property.** Expenditures for acquiring fixed assets, including land or existing buildings, improvements of grounds, initial equipment, additional equipment, and replacement of equipment.

In accordance with the Connecticut State Comptroller's definition equipment, included in this category are all items of equipment (machinery, tools, furniture, vehicles, apparatus, etc.) with a value of over \$5,000.00 and the useful life of more than one year and data processing equipment that has unit price under \$5,000.00 and a useful life of not less than five years

Other Application Requirements

A. Obligations of Grantees

All bidders are hereby notified that the grant to be awarded is subject to contract compliance requirements as set forth in Sections 4a-60 and 60a of the C.G.S. and Sections 46a-68j-23 et seq. of the Regulations of Connecticut State Agencies

Furthermore, the grantee must submit periodic reports of its employment and sub-contracting practices in such form, in such manner, and in such time as may be prescribed by the Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities (CHRO).

B. Freedom of Information Act

All of the information contained in a proposal submitted in response to this Request for Proposal (RFP) is subject to the Connecticut General Statutes Sections 1-200 et seq (FOIA) The FOIA declares that, except as provided by federal law or state statute, records maintained or kept on file by any public agency (as defined in the statute) are public records and every person has the right to inspect such records and receive a copy of such records.